

Minutes
King County Rural Forest Commission
March 20, 2001
Mercerview Community Center

Commissioners present: Gordon Bradley, Steve Ketz, Bill Kombol, Ken Konigsmark, Fred McCarty, Doug McClelland, Andrew Schwarz

Commissioners absent: Jean Bouffard, Rudy Edwards

Exofficio members: Connie Blumen, Lori Grant

Staff: Jerry Balcom, Kathy Creahan, Bill Loeber, Kristi McClelland, Benj Wadsworth

Guests: Dave Warren

Doug McClelland called the meeting to order at 10:00 am.

Minutes Approval

- Motion 1-301 “To adopt the February 15, 2001 minutes as written.” Moved, seconded and approved.

Staff Report

Benj notified the Commission that the Public Rule regarding forest plans had been updated. Most of the comments submitted by Steve Ketz and reiterated by Bill Kombol have been incorporated. Those that were not incorporated were elements that were copied verbatim from the WADNR regulations. The suggestion that “economic considerations” should not have to be addressed was accepted. Also, Benj pointed out that there are no requirements as to how any of the elements need to be addressed, only that they be addressed in some way. Bill Kombol asked how a forest landowner will be billed in the development of a forest plan. The County will not be billing. The owner has a number of options for developing the plan, from doing it individually, to hiring a forestry consultant, to using the services of the KC technical assistance foresters.

The public hearing about the moratorium on large churches and schools in the rural area will be held Monday, April 2. The Council is planning to create a task force to study the issue. Fred McCarty suggested that perhaps Ken Konigsmark should represent the Commission on the task force if the Council wants a formal representative. Bill Kombol also offered to serve as the Commission’s representative. Fred suggested that the Commission give the Executive Committee the authority to appoint someone as the RFC

representative. Doug suggested that the Commission notify the Council that they would like to have representation on the task force, and then choose a representative at the April meeting. All agreed that was a good idea.

Benj commented that the presentation to the NRPOS committee of Council about the monitoring report has been put on hold in order to develop a broader presentation about the “state of forestry” in King County. He will work with Council staff to set something up in the future. The Commission will still be the presenters with support from staff.

Work Plan

Benj emphasized the importance of focusing on the work plan in order to avoid being sidetracked by other issues that are likely to come up throughout the year. The work plan will guide the efforts of both the Commission and the staff. He distributed a list of work items and suggested that the Commission use it as a starting point for prioritizing projects.

Kathy Creahan summarized the accomplishments of which the RFC has been a part since its inception two and a half years ago. She feels that the recognition of the importance of forestland conservation in KC has increased substantially. The technical assistance program has developed very well with three Forest Stewardship classes being offered annually. The classes consistently fill up and get excellent evaluations by the students.

The County has acquired roughly 3000 acres for forestry. This includes Taylor Mountain, Ring Hill, several parcels on Mitchell Hill, the TDC bank purchase of Sugarloaf Mountain, possibly parts of the Polygon open space that will be dedicated to the County, and land associated with the Snoqualmie Initiative discussed at the last meeting.

Both the Water and Land Resources Division and Parks are realizing the need to conserve forests. Forests were a major theme in the Comprehensive Plan discussions over the past year. The Rock Creek Vision includes forest conservation and forestry as a major component. The requirement for forest management plans to develop in the FPD will publicize the concept of continued forest management in the FPD. There is a trend toward working with large landowners, and the role of KC forestland in offsetting carbon emissions is gaining recognition. The Forest Outreach Network has brought a number of environmental groups on board in recognizing the need to conserve the working forests in the foothills.

Bill Kombol commented that his company bought land near the Polygon property and was thinning it for a profit. He suggested that the County might have the opportunity to make some money while restoring the land that they will eventually own in that area.

Doug McClelland reiterated that the RFC has definitely had an impact in terms of advocating about the importance of conserving forestland and forestry.

Jerry Balcom gave an update on the status of the budget. The ANRI funds are running out, and thus the forestry program is at risk. There are a couple of major issues coming up with the 2002 budget. There is a 36 – 40 million dollar shortfall in the general fund. There is a hiring freeze in place, and luckily there have not been vacant positions in the forestry program. There is also a large shortfall in the Surface Water Management fund, which is expecting a 38% decrease in revenue and funds half of the forestry program. Staff has been actively looking for new sources of funds, including the dedication of revenue from forestry on state and federal lands to the forestry program. However, at present the budget office has interpreted state law to require that the revenue be distributed to a variety of programs. Another possibility for revenue generation is a move at the federal level that would allocate a certain portion of federal revenue generated from forestry on USFS lands to forest restoration activities. In the coming months, it will be important for the RFC to provide support for the continuation of the forestry program, and also be aware that there may be reductions in staff.

Steve Ketz asked if the County is considering the potential of revenue generation from the harvest of timber on County-owned forestland. Unfortunately, most of the land is not currently comprised of valuable timber. Discussion ensued about the need to take a close look at the management of County-owned forestland as it pertains to the big picture of forestland conservation in the County. The Executive office has asked staff to prepare a “forest policy paper” with the RFC to address these big-picture issues.

Discussion returned to the list of priorities. Benj asked how commissioners would like to approach the task of prioritization. Doug McClelland commented that the RFC should prioritize their work based on five criteria: 1) projects must be feasible; 2) there should be a focus on bipartisan efforts; 3) there should be immediate action; 4) there should be a tie-in with other organizations; and 5) actions should be bold.

Doug suggested that discussion start by having members state their top priorities. Steve Ketz commented that the County needs to develop the “forest vision” – where we want to be in the future. He feels that the Vision will determine what many of the other priorities are.

Doug suggested that advice on the management of County-owned forestland should be a high priority for the Commission. Bill Kombol emphasized the need for the County to earn revenue from its land. Andy Schwarz commented that the County should look into certification on its forestland. He feels that it will be easier to convince the public of the value of forestry on County lands if the lands are certified.

Jerry asked about the importance of advocacy and outreach. Doug commented that the efforts of the Forest Outreach Network are very important, as it is very helpful to have other organizations explaining the value of forestry.

Dave Warren stressed the importance of cooperative efforts among landowners and commented that he foresees the development of a Vashon forestry cooperative and a building for banking local lumber. Fred asked if it would be possible to facilitate cooperative efforts in other parts of the County. He feels that outreach is imperative to this effort.

Doug McClelland commented that the subjects under "County staff / Forestry program" (commenting on the budget, providing input on monitoring, and commenting on the WLRD reorganization) should not be a focus. He does feel that County expertise needs to be cross-departmental, and that the RFC can assist with the integration of forestry expertise into other County departments. Steve Ketz emphasized the need for a common vision across departments.

Kathy suggested that there is a need to bring in outside speakers and create forums whereby Commissioners can move beyond the arguments about the Comprehensive Plan and regulations. She suggested that field trips could be very helpful. Steve Ketz offered to conduct a trip on Weyerhaeuser lands. Doug emphasized the importance of leading trips for people that need to be educated about forest issues. Jerry feels that there is still a large component of the urban population that views forestry as a negative land use. He mentioned the movement in the 70s to conserve farmland and how public education was a critical part of that effort. Fred suggested that it could be helpful to collaborate with the agriculture commission. All agreed.

Andy Schwarz emphasized the need to stress sustainable forestry as opposed to the traditional, industrial model. Discussion ensued regarding certification. There was agreement that the Commission should not focus on it in the immediate future, but they should learn more about it. Andy commented that he feels it is a powerful tool and could be an important component of the Vision. Doug commented that the two most important items in terms of educating the Commission are certification and carbon sequestration. Kathy added that the marketing of local wood products, particularly certified products, is another topic worth learning about. She also commented that Executive Sims has announced an air quality initiative. Kathy feels that carbon sequestration could play a role in addressing air quality issues. There will be a symposium in May about the initiative, and Kathy is looking into including discussions about carbon sequestration. At some point, she would like to do an analysis of the carbon storage capacity of King County's forests.

Doug commented that the Commission should not focus on regulations, but he also feels that the Commission is responsible to make suggestions when regulatory issues are before the Executive and Council. He feels that it is the staff's responsibility to filter the

information and inform the Commission when they feel input is needed. He also feels strongly that the Commission should limit the amount of time that they spend discussing regulations. Benj suggested that in future discussions about regulations, the Commission should agree that if they cannot arrive at a consensus in an allotted time, they should end discussion and either vote or decide not to provide a comment. Kathy wondered if there are regulations that the Commission could propose that would help forest landowners.

Connie asked about the status of the prioritization of parcels for acquisition. She feels it is important that the forestry program contribute to the acquisition process, particularly in light of the fact that most of the money these days is tied to ESA. Andy commented that the RFC might want to spend some time developing criteria for how forestry acquisitions are made. Doug commented that there are three areas where the County is focusing its efforts right now; Mitchell Hill, the Raging/Taylor Mtn, and the Rock Creek Valley. He feels that there is a need to focus on what the future areas might be. Lori commented that the Rural Forest Focus Areas are a start toward prioritization.

Dave Warren asked about the status of the Tax-Free forestry bonds. Gene Duvernoy and Cedar River Associates gave a presentation to the Commission a couple of years ago, and it was decided that there is a need for the federal government to enable the program before focusing on it locally.

Benj asked about the feasibility of the Forest Bank, a program that the Nature Conservancy has initiated in other parts of the country whereby landowners agree to place an easement on their land in return for a guaranteed annual source of revenue from sustainable timber harvest. Commissioners expressed concern about the source of the guaranteed revenue.

Doug commented that there is potential for a greater link between the biosolids program and the forestry program.

In conclusion, Benj asked Commissioners to please complete the priorities form and send it to him via e-mail. He will compile notes from today's discussion and the completed forms submitted via e-mail and provide the Commission with a list of priorities at their next meeting. Kathy asked that Commissioners evaluate the list of outside speakers and add additional ones that they think might be appropriate. Doug suggested that the next meeting focus on the development of the forest vision/policy.

Election of officers was postponed due to lack of a quorum. Doug suggested that the Commission conduct elections via e-mail. Benj will organize an e-election.

Next meeting - Tuesday, April 17, 10:00 at Mercerview Community Center.